

# Auditing and Understanding Your School's Culture

## Why go this route?

- Because by auditing your school's culture, you can discover the extent to which culture influences the behavior of your school community.
- Because you can identify barriers to academic success.
- Because you can assess staff readiness for change and guide the change process.
- Because you can identify the espoused values and underlying beliefs within the school community.
- Because you can create/reinforce the school's vision.

## You'll Know You've Arrived When...

- Staff has identified the characteristics of the school culture.
- The school community has dialogued about shared values and beliefs about the school.
- Barriers to student learning at your school have been identified and reduced or eliminated.
- Staff has a plan for strengthening cultural weak spots needing improvement in your school.
- Staff has written the school's own story in a way that conveys a clear message about the school's values.
- Staff knows how it intends to actualize the school's vision by initiating strategies built on the school's cultural values.

## Construction Zone

This approach to understanding a school's culture requires hiring an outside consultant to conduct the audit in order to reduce the participants' fear of disclosure. A more "do-it-yourself" method is described in MI-Map Packet 3:1 "Developing a Climate Committee." Check both out before deciding.

## It's about TIME


- Allow the consultant a two-week window to collect, analyze and report the results of your cultural audit.
- The audit debrief can be completed in one hour.
- Book clubs or study groups should be given a minimum of four one-hour sessions.

## Potential COSTS

- Hiring a consultant could range from \$300 to \$5000.
- \$100 for refreshments might help set the tone for the debrief session with community members.
- Book Clubs to continue dialogue may need \$100 to \$1000 for support/supplies.

## The Process

*A step-by-step guide  
to auditing your school's  
culture to see what values  
are shaping your practices.*

**NOTE:** Steps marked with a   
are accompanied by one or more  
inserts, included in this packet.

Inserts for this packet are organized differently from other packets. For coherence, we've grouped a survey (for Step 1) with its interpretation guide (for Step 4) and possible interventions (for Step 6) for 5 different topics.

Inserts for Step 5 are on the last 3 pages.

- 1 Review the various types of school culture audits** to find those that best suit your school. One size does not fit all.

Five surveys or interviews you might want your consultant to pursue are lettered A-E. Each one is accompanied by an intervention and analysis guide (for Step 4) and suggested action plans (for Step 6). Charge a team to become familiar with the possibilities and oversee the work of the cultural auditor you'll hire in Step 2. See MI-Map Packet 8:1 "Setting Up Decision Making Teams" for a template "charge" that will clarify exactly what this team is responsible for.

- 2 Hire an outside "cultural auditor"** who will gather confidential information and aggregate it for community discussion.

MI-Map Packet 7:1 "Choosing and Managing Professional Development Providers" suggests a process for hiring an expert. ABCS coaches, whose contact information is on the Resource page, could do this work.

- 3 Arrange time for the school community** to participate in the audit interview process.

Schedule time and assist the cultural auditor by making introductions, arranging comfortable space and organizing materials and perhaps refreshments for the interviews. Set up a process for collecting surveys confidentially and getting them to the cultural auditor for analysis and aggregation.

- 4 Set up a community-wide debrief session** at which all sectors of the community can hear the results. Take time to celebrate strengths and discuss how to capitalize on them. Ask participants to give input about probable interventions for weaknesses identified through the audit process.

INSERTS A-E for Step 4 suggest analysis processes for the types of surveys in Step 1. The team working with the cultural auditor should meet ahead of time to hear audit results and plan the agenda for the community debrief.

- 5 Publish a simple cultural values statement or "school story"** based on the results of the culture survey.

Involve the full community in this process. INSERTS A-C for Step 5 outline a process for developing material for and publishing your school's "story."

- 6 Agree on an Action Plan** for addressing the issues that seem important to the community.

INSERTS A-D for Step 6 follow up on Step 4 Analysis with suggestions for interventions you might want to implement. Or your culture committee may identify your school's interventions.

- 7 Formalize a plan for on-going dialogue** about organizational culture and its effect on performance. For instance, consider study groups or book clubs.

## Getting more mileage from auditing your school's culture

*How reflecting together about the values that are underlying school practices can benefit your school in regard to the following initiatives:*

### **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**

- Just as NCLB asks teachers to use data to drive instructional decisions, so do building leaders need to move beyond acting on the basis of feelings alone. Data on school climate/culture must be collected, analyzed and used to plan and implement change in our schools.

### **Education Yes!**

- A school cultural audit could serve as evidence that schools are meeting criteria in multiple assessment categories, including 2.2 “Defined Process for Continuous Improvement,” 3.1 “Data Collection,” 8.1 “Communication,” and 8.2 “School/Community Relationships.”

### **MI-Plan**

- MI-Plan uses embedded surveys to measure achievement and perceptions. A school can add its own cultural audit data to MI-Plan’s bank of surveys as additional information to be analyzed when developing the school’s improvement plan.



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## Resources

### Books

#### ***The Power of Full Engagement***

Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz.  
Free Press. New York. 2003.

Just as athletes train, play and then recover, these authors advocate balancing stress and recovering in all facets of life and leadership.

#### ***The School Culture Assessment***

Gary Phillips. National School Improvement, Inc. Issaquah, WA. 2000.

This manual offers a practical outline of procedures for assessing the culture of a school and for building a new “culture of improvement” where collegiality, trust and self-determination exist for all members of the school community. Also visit:  
[garyphillips.com/books](http://garyphillips.com/books)

### Articles

#### ***The Creation of Company Cultures: The Role of Stories and Human Resource Systems.***

A. Wilkins. Human Resource Management 23 (4). Spring 1984.

### People

#### **Specialists**

Most Intermediate School Districts have a specialist working with schools on school culture in their service areas.

#### **Coaches**

The *Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools* website lists coaches whose training has been provided by Michigan State University and supported by the Michigan Department of Education. Some are active in working with cultural audits and interventions in Michigan schools. Please visit:

[www.abcscoaches.org](http://www.abcscoaches.org)

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